

Woodland Crofts Partnership response to Draft Moray Woodland and Forestry Strategy

The Woodland Crofts Partnership

The Woodland Crofts Partnership (WCP) is a partnership of 4 third-sector organisations, seeking to promote and develop woodland crofts. It comprises the Scottish Crofting Federation, the Community Woodlands Association, the Highlands Small Communities Housing Trust and Woodland Trust Scotland. We welcome this opportunity to comment on the Draft Moray Woodland & Forestry Strategy (the Strategy).

The Scottish Crofting Federation is the only member-led organisation dedicated to promoting crofting and it is the largest association of small scale food producers in the UK. Its mission is to safeguard and promote the rights, livelihoods and culture of crofters and their communities. Tel: 01599 530 005, www.crofting.org

The Community Woodlands Association is the direct representative body of Scotland's community woodland groups. It helps community woodland groups across the country achieve their aspirations and potential, providing advice, assistance and information, facilitating networking and training, and representing and promoting community woodlands to the wider world. Tel: 01309 674 004, www.communitywoods.org

The Highlands Small Communities Housing Trust is a registered charity helping rural communities secure long term solutions to their local housing needs. It represents a wide range of interests including communities, local government, landowners, crofters and housing associations. By helping rural communities meet their needs for additional affordable housing it plays an important role in actively supporting their long term viability. Tel: 01463 233 549, www.hscht.co.uk

Woodland Trust Scotland is part of the Woodland Trust, the UK's leading woodland conservation charity. Its vision is a UK rich in native woods and trees, enjoyed and valued by everyone. In Scotland it is currently leading the Croft Woodlands Project. Tel: 01738 635544, www.woodlandtrust.org.uk

Introduction

Overall, we support the proposals in the Strategy.

We support the vision and the 3 key themes. Within these, we are pleased to see reference to diversification and resilience; to an emphasis on local use, including construction, processing and woodfuel; and to the role of communities.

However, we are disappointed that there is no reference to woodland crofts at any point in the Strategy.

What is a woodland croft?

We define a woodland croft as a registered croft with sufficient tree cover overall to be considered a woodland. Note however that this is a descriptive term and there is no distinction in law between a woodland croft and any other kind of croft. Nevertheless, it is useful to highlight woodland crofts as a separate entity not least in terms of the opportunities and benefits they bring to the forestry sector.

Woodland crofts integrate small-scale woodland management with other land management activities and offer opportunities for housing and business development, thereby contributing to livelihoods and lifestyles.

They are supported by Scottish Government (for example being included in the Scottish Forestry Strategy and referenced in the current Programme for Government), by Forestry Commission Scotland, and by other Local Authorities in the crofting areas, such as Highland Council and Argyll and Bute Council.

Further information on woodland crofts can be found from various sources, in particular our website www.woodlandcrofts.org

The Moray Context

Although as the Strategy highlights, Moray is an important area for forestry and has a high proportion of woodland cover of all types, it is not one of the traditional crofting areas.

However, in 2010 the Scottish Government designated the local government area of Moray as one of a number of new areas in Scotland where new crofts could be created, following a consultation on the issue carried out in winter 2007/8.

From 2010 therefore, it has been possible to create new crofts in Moray under the provisions of the Crofting Reform etc Act 2007. This opportunity, together with the extensive & diverse nature of Moray's woodlands, means that Moray has significant potential for woodland crofts – something which is not currently reflected in the Strategy.

Woodland Crofts in Moray

The Strategy highlights 3 Key Themes to support its vision for forestry in Moray:

- 1. Harnessing the potential of our woodlands**
- 2. Connecting people and communities to our woodlands**
- 3. Protecting and enhancing our woodlands**

We list below just a few potential benefits of woodland crofts, with (in brackets) the theme against which they can deliver (a fuller list of potential benefits can be found in the Woodland Crofts Benefits Checklist [here](#)) :

- Delivery of local economic benefits from more intensive management of the woodland (1,2)
- Improvement of timber quality (and hence value) through increased silvicultural intervention (1,2,3)
- Providing an economically viable management solution where access to woodlands is restricted (1,2,3)
- Stimulating local economic activity through the provision of sites for homes and businesses (1,2)
- Encouraging the production and marketing of non-timber forest products (1,2,3)
- Developing niche markets for new woodland products (1,2,3)
- Increasing the sustainability and resilience of a rural community (1,2)
- Diversifying land tenure & management (1,2,3)
- Providing affordable access to woodland to families, to support their livelihoods & lifestyles (1,2)
- Providing sites for housing & extending communities in areas where sites are in short supply (1,2)

- Piloting models of low-carbon living which may be relevant to wider society (1,2)
- Creating a better age structure and species mix in the woodland (1,2,3)
- The adoption of lower impact silvicultural systems (1,2,3)
- Better protection & management of archaeology and other cultural resources (1,2,3)
- Improved woodland management for biodiversity (2,3)
- Developing woodland more resilient to the effects of climate change (1,2,3)

Conclusion

Woodland crofts deliver against most of the key issues in the Strategy. Due to the smaller-scale, more intensive approach employed, their development will not impact on the 'traditional' forestry sector. Indeed, they can add value to it by offering solutions to 'problem' woodlands where an industrial approach is found wanting, and also generate new entrants for the industry 'grown' from their 'family forestry' approach. They can also play their part in woodland expansion, where woodland crofts are established through planting bare land.

With Moray's significant woodland resource, it offers far better prospects for the development of woodland crofts than many areas of the traditional crofting counties. Given the benefits they bring, and the support for the model from the Scottish Government, we recommend that they are included as key priorities in the Strategy.

Woodland Crofts Partnership
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